



OCCUPATION OF PALESTINE

Use this sheet to:

- Learn how the conflict in Palestine engages the Responsibility to Protect
- Hold class/group discussions
- Find out how to take action

What it means to be Palestinian in the Occupied Territories

Life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) has been a never-ending cycle of violence and uncertainty for three generations of Palestinians born since the establishment of the Israeli State in 1947.

Annexed to Egypt and Jordan after the 1948 war, the OPT (Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem) has been occupied by Israel since the six-day war of 1967.

Over the next forty years, conflict raged between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation with three Palestinian uprisings (intifadas). More recently, a violent power struggle between Palestinian political parties has denied 3.5 million ordinary Palestinian the right to a free, peaceful and secure existence.

Attempted peace negotiations are thwarted by deeply-rooted distrust between Israelis and Palestinians and a lack of political will to maintain international pressure on Israel. The most difficult and important issues for resolution are often left out of negotiations altogether. These include the status of Jerusalem and the right of 5-8 million Palestinian refugees worldwide to return to their homeland, which would alter the character of Israel as a Jewish State. It is now widely accepted that the only hope for peace will be the establishment of two independent states in the Holy Land.

Israel's military incursion into the Gaza Strip in June 2006, was seen by many as further evidence of Israel's determination to seek retribution from all Palestinians for the anti-Israel terrorist activities of a small minority of fundamentalists. In the most violent conflict since October 2000, over 200 Palestinian civilians, including 44 children, were killed by Israeli offensives in a two-month period in 2006.

With over 1.5 million people, Gaza is one of the most densely populated places on earth (5,000 per km²). Of these, 945,000 are refugees, 466,000 of whom live in 8 refugee camps run by UN Relief & Works Agency.



Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears to my cry for relief!" Lam 3:52, 3:56

In addition to constant threats to physical security, hopes for self-sufficiency in the OPT are hindered by curfews, check points, routine civilian searches, prohibitions on transporting commercial goods, military destruction of civilian infrastructure and severe restrictions on entering and exiting the OPT.

The Palestinian Authority (PA), which provides basic services like education and health care, has been heavily dependant on foreign aid since the mid-1990s. But after Hamas - an anti-Israeli political party that refuses to renounce violence or recognise Israel - won the OPT's first elections in ten years in January 2006, the UN, US, EU and Russia suspended funding to the PA, crippling essential services.

Israel's blockade on Gaza, bombing of Gaza's only power plant, and unlawful withholding of Palestinian tax revenues, as well as its prohibition on money transfers to the PA imposed by the US-controlled international banking system, have created a situation of dire need for over 1 million Palestinians. It is the first time an occupied people, whose welfare is meant to be protected under international law, has been subject to such economic sanctions.

The Responsibility to Protect in Palestine

Under international law, an occupying power is responsible for the protection of all people in its acquired territory. The primary responsibility for civilians in the OPT thus lies with Israel and then with the Israeli-permitted Palestinian Authorities.

The situation in OPT may not be as obvious an engagement of



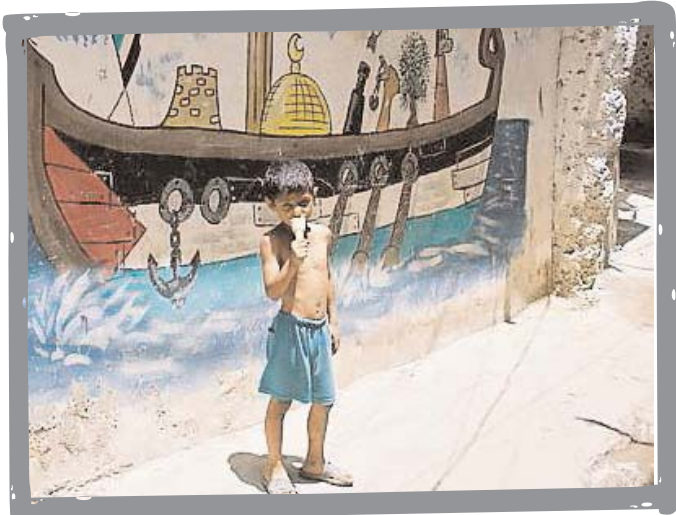
RMS Education Kit Sheet 5: The Responsibility to Protect in Palestine

When Israel completes the building of its 600km 'security' wall, a further 2 million Palestinians residing in the West Bank will be completely cut-off from schools, hospital, places of work, and vital land and water resources. 'The Wall' separates families and effectively imprisons residents, creating a new class of internally displaced persons. Israel has ignored worldwide condemnation of its construction.

R2P as are the situations in Darfur and Burma. We cannot prevent a conflict that has lasted for over 60 years, and the 'just cause' threshold requirement for military intervention, which requires the occurrence of large scale loss of life or ethnic cleansing, is not met. Nor can viable rebuilding begin while human security remains threatened.

However, the situation in Palestine does engage the core principle of R2P, which states that: "where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war; insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect." R2P does not require that we identify precisely whether Israel is 'unable' or 'unwilling' to protect, nor does it matter what reason a state gives for its failure. The fact that Palestinians have suffered serious harm for over 60 years is a manifest failing of all parties – the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority and the international community.

In the very place where Jesus walked upon the earth, walls now separate families and children of God – Christian, Muslim and Jew – are imprisoned in a deepening cycle of violence, humiliation and despair – World Council of Churches Peace Conference.



'Growing up in Shatila', a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Beirut, Lebanon, where CWS helps provide basic health care and schooling through the Middle East Council of Churches. Photo: James Thomson, CWS.

What Action does R2P call for?

The situation in the OPT shows the need to consider every R2P situation on its own merits, and to identify the precise content of a nation's primary responsibility to protect in unique circumstances. In relation to the OPT, the International Community has the responsibility to:

- **Facilitate the peace process** by forging a two state solution dealing with the status of Jerusalem and the right of return for Palestinian refugees.
- **Restore aid-cuts** to the elected Palestinian Authority, which has effectively placed 'economic sanctions' on Palestinian civilians and put enormous strain on overstretched aid agencies.
- **Put serious pressure on Israel** to search for a viable two-state solution, remove the separation wall, cease diverting scarce water resources from the OPT, permit greater freedom of movement, cease military operations that disregard civilian safety and give taxes collected from Palestinians to the Palestinian Authority.



TAKE ACTION ON PALESTINE!

- **Raise awareness in your community about life in the OPT and the need for stronger international action.** See: www.ncca.org.au/cwslr2p
- **Raise support for health services for Palestinians in the West Bank. Gifts to CWS Partners4Peace can be earmarked for 'Palestinians'.** Call toll-free on 1800 025 101 or email partners4peace@ncca.org.au.
- **Find out about the World Council of Churches-led Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel:** www.eappi.org